

## Article

# Inclusion in Norwegian Higher Education: Deaf Students' Experiences with Lecturers

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## Abstract

Nordic research concerning disabled higher education students has suggested that inclusion often simply means placement among non-disabled peers. Individual disabled students are the ones who must bridge the gap between which accommodations are offered and what their felt needs are. The study presented in this article is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with five deaf Norwegian master's degree students. Teachers' knowledge regarding visually oriented instruction and intercultural communication was central to the students' perceived inclusion. The informants largely saw themselves as responsible for academic inclusion and would make demands for adjustments only when all other options were exhausted. Achieving results was given such priority and demanded so much effort that little energy was left for social activities and interaction with hearing peers. This article discusses the lack of experienced inclusion understood as a collective practice encompassing both academic and social aspects. Deaf students' own experiences are resources for improvement that remain untapped by Norwegian universities.

## Keywords

academic inclusion; classroom accommodation; deafness; disability; higher education; intercultural communication; Norway; social integration

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

During the last two decades, there has been a change in Norway from a situation where few deaf people had access to and attended higher education to a situation where higher education is supposed to be routinely accessible. Norwegian universities are expected to facilitate inclusive education in line with Norway's commitments to, for example, the Salamanca Statement

(UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (Utenriksdepartementet [UNCRPD], 2012). The number of deaf students attending universities has increased accordingly in Norway, as in many other countries, over the past 20 years (Hansen, 2005; Lang, 2002).

This article presents a small qualitative interview study with five deaf master's degree students. In general, there are few Nordic studies regarding deaf students in

higher education, and, as far as we know, none focusing on master's degree students.

The main research question guiding the study is: what are the lived experiences of deaf Norwegian master's degree students in so-called inclusive teaching settings?

In this text, we focus particularly on the primary results of the analysis, which are concerned with notions of inclusion in general and the lecturer's role as the facilitator of inclusive practices in particular. In the following sections, we present research approaches to the study field, as well as the study's background and methodology. From there we move to the results and their analysis before concluding the article by discussing its most important findings.

## 2. Intertwined Notions of d/Deafness

In the field of Deaf studies, many scholars have followed the custom of differentiating between the medical condition of being deaf (which is written with a lowercase 'd') and being a member of a signing community (in which case Deaf is written with a capital 'D'; see, for example, Markowicz & Woodward, 1978; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Woodward, 1972).

For the purposes of this study, we propose that it might be fruitful to approach d/Deafness in a way that encompasses perspectives derived from both sign language and Deaf studies and disability studies. The former perspective approaches interactions between Deaf and typical hearing people in terms of language and culture, and here we can also draw on research concerning intercultural communication. The latter perspective links the matter at hand with general research on disabled students in higher education. Furthermore, disability studies traditionally distinguish between bodily impairment and disability. The latter is a social phenomenon that manifests when a person with an impairment encounters socially created barriers in his or her interaction with a social environment (Shakespeare, 2006).

A previous analysis performed by Kermit (2009) has pointed out that the distinction between deafness (as physical impairment) and Deafness (as lingual and cultural belonging) does not encompass this third notion of deafness as socially-created disability, which we find relevant to include. In what follows, we simply chose to use the term "deaf" in accordance with standard spelling rules, keeping in mind that this term is meant to encompass all three of these different and intertwined notions of d/Deafness: deafness as impairment, deafness as disability due to socially created barriers, often in the form of discrimination, and finally Deafness as lingual and cultural belonging.

The point here is not to suggest that one of these notions of d/Deafness should be ascribed ontological or epistemic superiority; rather, we suggest that these notions are intertwined in the lived experience of d/Deaf people.

## 3. Research Concerning Higher Education: Disabled Students in General and Deaf Students in Particular

There is a large body of international studies focused on disabled students in higher education. A recent publication by Langørgen, Kermit and Magnus (2018) has commented that many of these studies point in much the same direction. Even though all students are expected to struggle to achieve their educational goals, many disabled students face additional struggles that are often associated with lack of access, participation, and inclusion.

In 2002, Harry Lang published a review study on deaf students in higher education that highlighted several research priorities. Among other ideas, Lang has pointed out that much is known about the barriers deaf students face in higher education, but much less is known about what may lower these barriers and improve the academic achievement and retention of deaf students. One predictor of academic success is increased participation of deaf learners in the higher education classroom. Lang has pointed out the necessity of examining the relationship between deaf students' participation and academic achievement when the instruction is being given directly or via interpreters (Lang, 2002). The topics suggested by Lang have been addressed in more recent studies. Powell, Hyde and Punch (2014) have focused on communication barriers and access to interpreters as an important prerequisite for participation in higher education. Noble (2010) has pointed out the necessity of the lecturer being prepared to receive a deaf student into his or her classroom, and the environment being both physically and technologically adapted to accommodate the deaf student's needs. Ross and Yerrick (2015) have addressed the role of the lecturer, as Ross has described her own experiences as a deaf student and emphasised the importance of student-lecturer cooperation. In her experience, it is important that the lecturer asks the student about his or her needs rather than assuming that he or she knows what is best for the student.

## 4. Inclusion and Communication

Deaf people may be viewed as a lingual and cultural minority, and in accordance with this perspective, interpreters facilitate classroom communication between lecturer and student. The responsibility for the quality of the communication, however, lies with the lecturer and the student. Bilingual teaching can thus be seen as intercultural communication. A prerequisite for intercultural communication is intercultural competence. Spitzberg (2009) has pointed out that intercultural competence encompasses three distinct capacities: 1) attitudes, 2) knowledge, and 3) skills. In Spitzberg's words, attitudes "include awareness of cultural values, understanding and devaluing of ethnocentrism or discrimination and appreciation of the value of risk taking and cross-cultural interaction" (Spitzberg, 2009, p. 425). The second capacity, knowledge, "includes an awareness of self,

and understanding of oppressions, and an appreciation of the nature of social change and the effects of cultural differences on communication" (Spitzberg, 2009, p. 425). Skills, the third capacity, "include an ability to engage in self-reflection, identify differences, take multiple perspectives in multiple contexts, and challenge discriminatory acts" (Spitzberg, 2009, p. 425). These perspectives emphasise an understanding of intercultural communication as vital for inclusive communication, and thus inclusive practises. The communicator is challenged to see the other from the inside, and to see oneself from the outside, which is indeed a demanding task (Rygg, 2014).

## 5. Methods and Material

The researchers involved in this study are interested in the phenomenon of inclusion, especially in connection with deafness. In order to explore inclusion in a higher education setting, five deaf master's degree students were recruited to participate in an interview-based study. The study was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and permission to conduct the study was granted.

The students were strategically selected because they had experience in master's degree education both in terms of attending general courses and as members of a co-enrolled deaf group. It was thus an important goal to investigate the students' experiences being taught by lecturers with varying levels of knowledge about deaf students in various teaching situations.

The university administration contacted the students by e-mail in order to ensure that no pressure would be felt if the researchers contacted them directly. A total of seven students were contacted, and five agreed to participate in the study. All of the informants were women between the ages of 35 and 55. They all had a minimum of preschool teacher or teacher education; three of the informants had additional undergraduate education. All informants therefore had significant work experience within a broad field of educational services. This meant that their perspectives on central topics such as inclusion were dealt with both as a question of personal experiences and as concepts they were familiar with professionally.

Four of the interviews were conducted at the informant's place of work and one interview at the informant's home, according to the informants' wishes. According to the informants' preferences, four of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian Sign Language and one in spoken Norwegian. The researchers themselves, both of whom are fluent in Norwegian Sign Language and spoken Norwegian, carried out all interviews. All interviews were also filmed. In preparation for the analysis of the collected data, one of the researchers translated the interviews into written Norwegian. When there was doubt concerning a phrase, the phrase would be viewed by both researchers. All of the filmed material was examined in this manner twice, and then

both researchers reviewed the films and written translations a third time. The written translations were subsequently analysed using a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998), where our primary focus was on the informants' experiences of inclusive and exclusive practices. The translations were coded according to topics, and these topics were ordered according to frequency and emphasis given by the informants. The topics were subsequently grouped in order to establish what underlying concepts they represented. Phenomenological analysis is thus based on qualitative and hermeneutical principles, but the overarching analytical goal is to get behind the mere descriptive understanding of the data, grasp the underlying meanings, and so explore the deeper structures of the students' experiences.

Upon the conclusion of the analysis, the five informants were invited to a seminar where the researchers presented their analysis of the material. Three informants were able to attend and were invited to respond to the analysis, elaborate on the findings, and correct lingual or conceptual misinterpretations. Methodologically speaking, this is often referred to as respondent validation or member check (Creswell, 1994). This seminar was not filmed, but extensive notes were taken by one of the researchers.

## 6. Results and Analysis

All the informants were professionally engaged in pedagogical fields and were thus familiar with concepts such as inclusion and participation. When reflecting on these concepts during the interviews, however, none of them drew on their own professional experiences as teachers; instead, they focused solely on their experiences as students.

When asked about inclusion or the lack thereof, the informants all steered the conversation towards their different experiences with different lecturers. They identified the lecturer as the person with both the opportunity and the means to either promote or hinder inclusion. They emphasised that the lecturers' knowledge of deafness and the accompanying practical teaching skills were crucial factors. At the same time, they indicated that knowledge and skills were not enough if the lecturers displayed disablist or audiocentric attitudes towards deaf students. The informants thus spontaneously pointed to the intercultural capacities introduced by Spitzberg (2009). By doing so, they also proposed that the cultural and lingual aspects of deafness were the ones they identified with most compared to the disability aspect.

Different lecturers' level of competence and knowledge concerning deafness is the organising principle in the following text. Schematically, we can distinguish between three levels of competence among the lecturers described by the informants: 1) lecturers with no or little deaf competence, who had never met or taught deaf students, and who faced them and the interpreters for the first time; 2) lecturers with some deaf competence, rang-

ing from those who had some prior experience teaching in bilingual settings with a sign language interpreter, to typically hearing lecturers who are proficient in sign language; and 3) lecturers with high deaf competence, who teach in sign language or in spoken Norwegian, but are conscious of the demands of visually oriented instruction (Hansen, 2005).

Before returning to the different levels of lecturer competence, some general aspects of the results and analysis are presented to clarify why the emphasis on the lecturers' competence seems analytically reasonable.

## 7. Central Aspects of the Informants' General Situation

### 7.1. *Struggle for Inclusion and Participation*

The informants described typical learning activities as attending lectures and working with other students in colloquiums, the latter mostly privately organised by students. It is noteworthy, that the informants had little to say about typically hearing, non-signing fellow students' roles in inclusion or exclusion. The informants did not give any examples where fellow non-signing students had acted in ways that promoted inclusive practices.

The emphasis on attending lectures is understandable because the Norwegian master's degree students are expected to study and work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning process. The lecture is thus the primary situation where students and university lecturers meet. When many students attend a course, the lecture might take place in a large lecture theatre, offering little opportunity for interaction between the lecturer and the students. Many master's degree courses, however, have only a small group of students, and these courses will often have a more interactional character where the lecturer and the students discuss the topic at hand and maintain a running dialogue. Our informants had experienced lectures in large groups, typically in courses on methodology (i.e., research methods and statistical methods). They had also attended lectures in smaller groups during courses specific to their subject matter. In the large groups, they had always been a minority. In the smaller groups, some of the students had attended courses where there was an even balance between deaf and typically hearing students. The informants' general expectations concerning learning outcomes was closely linked to attending lectures, since the lecture was the place where the course curriculum was presented and explained.

As indicated above, there might also be another reason why the lectures became a focal point in the interviews: the informants ascribed informal responsibility for inclusion to themselves and to their fellow hearing students; however, to them, the lecturers represented the face of the university and were the professionals who were formally responsible for its inclusive practices. To the informants, the inclusive practices established by the lecturer, or the lack thereof, influenced the way deaf and

typically hearing, non-signing students would interact and cooperate both inside and outside the lecture theatre. Hence, the finding that the lecturer decisively influences the ways in which different learning practices become inclusive, is an important finding and one that has been supported by other studies (e.g., Antia & Stinson, 1999; Antia, Stinson, & Gaustad, 2002; Hansen, 2005; Ohna, 2005).

As suggested above (referencing Kermit, 2009), the respective notions of deafness as disability and as lingual and cultural belonging are intertwined, and they proved to be so in this study. As previously mentioned, the students' own focus rested firmly on the latter concept of deafness. Even though, in terms of disability, the students described experiences of outright discrimination and encounters with several socially constructed barriers, their own narratives and descriptions emphasised aspects of intercultural communication challenges. In compliance with the informants' preferred perspective on deafness and intercultural communication, we structured the results in accordance with different levels of lecturers' deaf competence.

### 7.2. *Lecturers with Little or No Deaf Competence*

The teaching style of lecturers who have never met or taught deaf students is best described as teaching solely on the terms of the typically hearing. These are generally lecturers who conduct their business as usual without regard for the presence of deaf students and interpreters in the group. This often means the absence of observable inclusive practices, which manifests itself in several examples offered by our informants. A lecturer who lacks a basic understanding of what it means to teach in a bilingual and visually orientated setting will seldom observe or appreciate that deaf students struggle when they must simultaneously direct their gaze at the interpreter and at other objects of interest such as the blackboard, the text of the PowerPoint presentation, or other artefacts used by the lecturer. If the lecturer maintains a running dialogue with the students during the lecture, he or she may not pay attention to the time lag between what is spoken and what the interpreter translates. The deaf student's ability to enter the conversation is therefore significantly decreased, and even keeping up visually with who is saying what can be a confusing struggle when fellow students engage in animated discussions and the deaf student must look at the interpreter and look around in order to identify who is talking.

This teaching style also encompasses other less easily observable aspects of exclusion. The lecturer may not be aware of the importance of offering either the interpreter or the deaf student preparation materials before lectures, a measure that can counter some of the challenges associated with taking notes while looking at the interpreter.

When faced with lecturers who have little or no deaf competence, deaf students must accept the primary re-

sponsibility of informing the lecturer of the minimum requirements for accessible teaching. The informants typically described this activity as “asking for adaptations”. An informant recalls:

I am older now, but it is still hard to ask [for adaptations] all the time. When I was younger, it was unpleasant to ask....I eventually stopped asking. I chose to read afterwards and tried to understand on my own.

By choosing such words, the students indicated that this was a constant element of frustration they had repeatedly encountered throughout much of their education. When lecturers do not establish inclusive practices, deaf students must appeal to the lecturers’ benevolence in order to obtain something they see as their self-evident right. None of the informants had, however, confronted their lecturers and pointed out that establishing inclusive practices should be the responsibility of the lecturers, not the deaf students. The informants’ description resembles what disability researcher Donna Reeve has called psycho-emotional disablism: the non-disabled, often unthinkingly, convey the tacit signal that the disabled person always comes second compared to the non-disabled (Reeve, 2014). Reeve describes the effects of such treatment as internalised oppression. The deaf informants, however, all adamantly stated that they saw themselves as equal to their typically hearing student peers. This statement of equality was firmly anchored in their everyday experience of belonging to a lingual and cultural signing minority community. The understanding of deafness as lingual and cultural belonging thus demonstrates an important moral and practical advantage compared to the disability approach. The everyday experience of belonging to an interdependent signing community was the source of a moral conviction derived from practical experience, not a mere theoretical argument about equality.

The fact that deaf students’ capacity for resilience is strengthened by their lingual and cultural belonging when facing discrimination is an important result that has been confirmed by other studies on deafness. Though the formulations vary, numerous studies have proposed the practical superiority of the lingual and cultural approach (Bauman, 2004; Bauman & Murray, 2014; Harris, 1995; Ladd, 2005; Ladd & Lane, 2013). Nevertheless, this study further describes deaf students’ experiences of encountering or approaching lecturers with little or no prior knowledge of deafness. When the topic was raised, the different lecturers’ attitudes were immediately identified as a crucial aspect with profound effects.

The informants distinguished between three different types of attitudes: 1) the stereotyping attitude that deaf students are in need of special education; 2) an indifferent attitude; and 3) an open and inquisitive attitude.

As for the first type of attitude, all of the informants shared the experience of a lecturer treating them as infe-

rior to typically hearing students. In the context of higher education, this experience of discrimination, or being ‘othered’, was comprised of different elements, many of which are strongly linked to tacit attitudinal signals to deaf students. The general signal thus conveyed was that the lecturer though the deaf students should have been directed to some form of special needs education so that the lecturer would be spared the extra trouble of adjusting to the deaf students’ needs. The feeling impressed on the deaf informants was that such adjustments were obstructing the effective teaching of the rest of the students. A frequent example of how this attitude played out was when lecturers indicated that efforts to prepare interpreters or adjust their lecturing style in order to accommodate for interpreting was a nuisance. An informant says:

I didn’t ask for much, only some consideration, but no. I didn’t get PowerPoints before the lecture. Some gave them to me but told me not to share them with other [students]. I felt I was made special and I didn’t want that. If the interpreter asked for a repetition, she was ignored. The lecturer just continued.

In the informants’ opinions, this experience of being reduced to the hearing-impaired person in need of special treatment was the ultimate denigration and something that severely obstructed both access to participation and learning. Furthermore, when lecturers displayed this attitude it destroyed the informants’ motivation to try to engage socially with typically hearing fellow students. This result from the analysis was explicitly presented to the informants present at the respondent validation seminar, and they confirmed the finding:

Low [deaf] competence, that is as if there are no deaf people in the group, that’s the most excluding way, might even be discrimination....Deaf people’s needs become individual or private, it’s not *our* interpreter but *your* interpreter. [It’s] tiresome, lonely, you lose information [and] the motivation to engage socially is reduced.

The second attitude, indifference, shares the main characteristics of the stereotyping attitude. The lecturer sees no reason why he or she cannot teach in his or her traditional fashion, that is, the fashion suitable for typically hearing students. Even though this attitude does not encompass the first attitude’s elements of outright discrimination, the effects on the deaf students are quite similar: the informants experienced isolation and a lack of participation both during and outside of lectures. Their learning processes were reduced to what they could accomplish individually, and the informants generally felt that the lectures were barriers they had to scale rather than assets promoting participation in a learning community of peers. This lack of inclusive practices has been well described in research (Kermit, 2018) and is above all charac-



terised by individualisation of the student's responsibility. In terms of the classic disability study approach, this is what the "medical model of disability" (Shakespeare, 2006) means. The indifferent or unreflective attitude implies that since it is the student's hearing impairment that causes all the extra challenges, it is the student who must carry all the responsibility for bridging the gap between what is offered and what is required in terms of accommodation. The interpreter, for example, is typically seen as the deaf student's individual aid instead of as a professional who works with all parties present.

The informants reported that when they encountered the first two types of attitudes, being part of a co-enrolled group of deaf students was a great comfort. There is strength in numbers, and the informants said that the support they lent each other eased the burdens associated with being 'othered' by the lecturer. It did not, however, make contact with typically hearing peers any easier.

The third attitude, the open and inquisitive attitude, is perhaps the most interesting. In the context of disability research, the effects of discrimination are well known and have been described in similar ways to those above. Some of our informants emphasised that even a lecturer with no prior knowledge concerning deafness could promote inclusive practices as long as he or she was "open and inquisitive". We interpret this in line with the previously mentioned research on intercultural communication. Instead of facing deaf students with premeditated stereotypical ideas about 'them', the open and inquisitive lecturer first and foremost signals that even though the deaf student might be different, he or she is not unequal or inferior. The informants who brought this to our attention indicated that the open inquisitiveness in many ways compensated for the lack of actual competence. This makes sense, especially when compared to the strong resentment the informants felt when they perceived that lecturers saw them as students in need of special educational measures. The simple attitudinal signal of equality was a source of motivation and an incentive to engage fellow hearing students and generally participate in activities inside and outside of lectures.

### *7.3. Lecturers with Some Deaf Competence*

As mentioned above, these lecturers range from those who have some prior experience teaching in bilingual settings with a sign language interpreter, to typically hearing lecturers who are quite proficient in sign language. Significantly, they all make certain adaptations to their teaching style in order to facilitate both bilingual teaching situations and a visually orientated learning environment. This teaching style is nevertheless based on traditional models of teaching the typically hearing and therefore favours the typically hearing students at the expense of the deaf students. Examples of these lecturers' adaptations range from routinely preparing interpreters to more thorough lecture planning. In the latter case, the lecturer would realise that the deaf students should be

allowed to look at one object at a time and would, for example, routinely give all students time to read the PowerPoint slide before beginning to comment on its text. In the same fashion, the lecturer could organise a sitting arrangement where students were seated in a semi-circle facing the blackboard so that all students could see who was talking or signing.

Understanding these lecturers' attitudes is somewhat more complex compared to understanding the attitudes of the low-competence group of lecturers. Since these lecturers have a certain level of knowledge concerning deafness, visual communication, and visually organised classroom practices, it is not so much a question of whether or not they have dis/abling attitudes. It is more a question of how, and to what degree, they choose to act on their knowledge. One example offered by the informants was that of a lecturer who knew Norwegian Sign Language quite well but still chose to teach in spoken Norwegian. The lecturer facilitated visual access and prepared the interpreters, but the informants still felt that this lecturer would have sent a much more inclusive signal if she had chosen to sign instead. Another example frequently mentioned was that of lecturers who would excuse themselves for neglecting to prepare the interpreters or for not having sent the students handouts before the lecture. These were lecturers who would also 'forget' to observe the principles of visually organised teaching and, for example, simultaneously talk and show a slide with text. An Informant says: "I often remind them, but the lecturers forget. I don't want to make a fuss, that is unpleasant. I remind them once, maybe twice, some forget anyway".

This kind of unthinking audiocentrism affected students in much the same way as the indifferent low-competence lecturers mentioned above. The deaf students felt they were relegated to second place compared to their typically hearing peers. Also, their learning processes became less collective and more individual, though they would find the same strength in numbers as mentioned above.

### *7.4. Lecturers with High Deaf Competence*

The high-competence lecturers would teach in sign language and let the interpreters translate to spoken Norwegian. Some of these lecturers were themselves deaf. When discussing these lecturers, the informants reported that they felt they were on an even footing with their typically hearing fellow students, because signing lecturers automatically observed and obeyed the demands of a visually oriented classroom. These lecturers would, for example, automatically pause for the audience to read bullet points on a slide. Turn-taking in discussions would also be visually structured. For example, the lecturer would visually identify any students who were called upon to sign or speak.

Even though this was the informants' preferred way of being taught, they did acknowledge that hearing lec-

turers who were proficient in sign language but taught in spoken language also contributed to a sense of inclusion and equality. This, however, requires that the lecturer adheres to all the characteristics of a visually oriented classroom and simultaneously pays attention to the interpreter in order to monitor the translation. The latter could prove vital in enabling deaf students to make comments at the appropriate point during class discussions.

Teaching in sign language was thus reported to be the only instance where the informants felt that all barriers to learning and participation fell away, and the learning process became collective in ways that triggered both motivation and creativity. Such effects were particularly significant where there was an even number of deaf and hearing students. An Informant recalls:

[The lecturer] signed at high speed and the interpreters had to work hard to voice her. The conversation was fun and animated, but I sensed that the hearing [students] became quieter and that we deaf kind of forgot them a bit.

When the researchers pressed the question about inclusive practices, the informants reflected on whether a signing lecturer represents a genuinely inclusive practice, or whether this is just a way of turning the table on the typically hearing students, excluding them in the same manner that the deaf students were often excluded.

## 8. Discussion

Our results are in accordance with findings in a 1999 study by Foster (referred to in Lang, 2002): according to the deaf students, effective lecturers have two unique characteristics. First of all, the deaf students preferred professors who understood deaf people and deafness as an educational condition, and secondly, students who use sign language valued lecturers who were able to communicate clearly in signs.

In terms of inclusion-related questions, these findings may require further qualification to actually contribute to an increased understanding of the challenges at hand. There is a particularly important distinction between individual and collective aspects of studying and learning in the material, and, similarly, a distinction between academic and social inclusion.

Our results and subsequent analysis suggest that for the informants, the question of inclusion is often reduced to an individual matter, where hearing impairment is seen as the main—and individual—problem. This reduction is systematic in the sense that it reflects the results of institutional factors and factors related to lecturers' professional conduct.

The overall impression given is that lectures with deaf students and interpreters present are conducted like any other lecture, even by lecturers with some deaf competence. The institutionalised idea of what a lecture is seems to be intrinsically connected to the idea of the

student being typically hearing and speaking. In this manner, inclusion means little more than placement (Haug, 2016), and the overall absence of inclusive practices reflects the attitude that deaf students' presence is in itself sufficiently inclusive, but all other matters associated with deaf students' needs are reduced to their individual problems. This finding is in line with recent reports about hearing-impaired children and adolescents in so-called inclusive settings in Nordic kindergartens and schools (Kermit, 2018). Even though these institutions are legally required to be inclusive, since 2010 Nordic research has generally pointed out that in most kindergartens and schools it is (hearing) business as usual, and the hearing-impaired children and adolescents have to fend for themselves as best they can.

One effect of inclusion as placement is that deaf students become individually responsible for their inclusion and individually dependent on the good will of individual lecturers. Theoretically, when placement is confused with inclusion, it is only the fulfilment of a token right for deaf students to be formally equal to their classmates. In reality, placement is a form of discrimination because of the tacit signal conveyed to the deaf student that his or her needs are less important compared to the needs of other students. A lecturer is supposed to teach in a manner whereby he or she is both attentive and adaptive to the needs of the students in general. Even though many lecturers in higher education might be less observant when it comes to this professional responsibility, the usual lecture is at least in a crude sense accessible to typically hearing students. This way of reasoning leads to a more fundamental theoretical point concerning inclusion: it is not about adaptations in order for one individual to better fit in with the rest. There is an element of reciprocity to inclusion that negates an individualised understanding of the concept. Among traditions supporting this notion, neo-Hegelian philosophers promoting ideas about reciprocal recognition have formulated the idea that discrimination is not only a problem for the one who is discriminated, but also for the society at large wherein discrimination is taking place (Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1992). Reciprocal recognition is thus a fundamental prerequisite for social justice and for the individual's access to authentic self-appreciation (Danermark & Gellerstedt, 2004). The implication of a token inclusion reduced to placement is that overlooking the needs of one group of students is a problem not only for this particular group but for all students, and ultimately for the society where such practices occur. In other words, the individualisation of deaf students' needs is a collective problem, because the lack of inclusive practices is a problem for everyone, not only those who suffer the most because of it. This is not just a theoretical statement; it is also practical. Haug (2016) has pointed out that in general, good teaching practices probably contribute more to inclusion than do special measures designed to assist the individual student who is "different". Along the same line of reasoning, one could suggest that inclusive practises designed

to serve the collective community of students might have positive effects for all students. Finally, the collective approach to inclusive practices also rejects any notion of inclusion as some sort of good deed the “normal” choose to perform to accommodate the needs of those who are “different”. On the contrary, inclusion is not something depending on someone’s good will; it is a principle formulating what kind of organisation we have chosen for our educational systems and ultimately for our societies.

These deliberations regarding inclusive practices are not original but merely a summary of how inclusion is understood in, for example, the UNCRPD. Nevertheless, the present study sheds light on some important aspects of inclusion, or the lack thereof. In the context of inclusion as an individual or collective effort, the informants’ distinction between academic and social inclusion is of interest. The informants largely saw themselves as solely responsible for academic inclusion and would ask for adjustments only when all other options were exhausted. Achieving academic results was thus given such priority and demanded so much effort that little energy was left for social activities and interaction with typically hearing peers.

In light of the above promotion of inclusion as a collective undertaking, the division between what is considered academic versus social should be critically examined. The informants clearly distinguished between the academic and the social, particularly when describing their experiences with token inclusion and placement. When describing signing lectures, on the other hand, they described their learning processes in collective terms as something they achieved as members of a community of learners (Antia et al., 2002). Again, this might not be a novel discovery, but the findings emphasise that individual approaches to inclusion cement a misunderstood and discarded notion of education as something you can get from books if you are so unfortunate as to be unable to achieve it with fellow peers (see, for example, Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

In the context of higher education, it might very well still be a widespread truism among lecturers that their responsibilities as teachers are limited to the academic, whatever that might entail. The informants’ identification of the lecturer as a key person when it comes to inclusion is an important finding in this context. Even though the informants addressed the lecturers’ individual attitudes, they also saw the lecturer as the professional representative of the university and the one with the formal responsibility and the means to establish inclusive practices. This points not only to the individual lecturer but also to the university’s responsibility, and again emphasises that inclusion involves questions of policies and organisation, perhaps to a larger extent than questions about attitudes. Universities should establish inclusive policies and formulate a clear mandate for all employees that inclusive practices are obligatory rather than individual options to be chosen or discarded according to preference or taste.

The above reflections on inclusion are not limited to deaf students. To point out what clearly does not work (the individual approach) and suggest a theoretical alternative (the collective approach) might not provide much guidance when someone asks what inclusive practices might look like. The focus on deafness in this study, however, involves aspects of inclusion as practice that are likely relevant to other contexts as well.

The informants’ conviction of formal equality in spite of discrimination was a strong source of positive self-identification. This is a central result of this study: the students fought the stigma of deafness as disability not by admitting to it or accepting the role of victims of discrimination; rather, they turned the table and identified the problem as the lecturers’ lack of competence and questionable attitudes, thus retaining positive self-identification. This can be interpreted in several ways. First, the cultural and lingual approach is both relevant and a source of positive self-identification (Honneth, 1995). This is an approach where strength in numbers is also helpful, because a group of deaf students can display both for themselves and for their typically hearing fellow students and lecturers that they constitute a lingual community rather than a group of disabled students. The three capacities of intercultural competence mentioned above (attitudes, knowledge, and skills) have been proven relevant in this study as key concepts when establishing intercultural communication. Building on these concepts in our analysis also allowed for a structured rendering of the different experiences of the informants, since they had faced lecturers with different levels of competence concerning deafness. The informants used strong words to describe the differences between being recognised as a signing person and being categorised as a “special education case”. The former is the prerequisite for inclusion, whereas the latter nullifies all attempts at inclusion. This in itself might be an important part of the answer to how inclusive practices should be. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the students did not consider it problematic if the lecturer had no prior experience with deafness/signing as long as he or she was open and inquisitive in a recognising manner and would ask the students about their preferences instead of just assuming something about them.

Secondly, by redefining the lack of inclusive practices as lack of intercultural communication skills, the informants highlighted a pathway to more inclusive practices. The nearest thing to inclusive practices identified in this study is when the teaching practices allow for visually oriented languages. This need not be happening only when the lecturer signs, but also when the open and inquisitive lecturer adapts to the demands of a visually oriented classroom. The list of requirements for a visually oriented classroom is not long, but the complexity involved should not be underestimated: making a teaching situation visibly accessible to all students may not require more than adjustments to the seating arrangement, obedience to simple rules of turn-taking, and an awareness



of the necessity of a structure where one need only look at one thing at the time. The more complex matter regards the more profound question of how to achieve inclusive practices encompassing both deaf and typically hearing students. Since none of the deaf students' experiences could actually be said to represent such practices, this question has yet to be answered. We can only point out that the informants had never before been asked for their thoughts concerning teaching styles and inclusion. Lecturers should therefore not assume that they know what is best for the students or that they themselves can define when inclusion has been achieved. Lecturers should ask students like our informants how they think inclusive practices might be achieved and commit themselves to mutual cooperation with all of their students.

## 9. Conclusion

The informants' lack of experience with collective inclusive practices promoting an intertwined notion of academic and social achievements is problematic. Norwegian universities' formal obligation to promote inclusion must be regarded as any other legally imposed demand on higher education institutions and not as a mere appeal to the individual lecturer. The individualised model where social aspects of studying at a university are downgraded must be challenged. The division between what is academic and what is social is hardly productive for the deaf students, their fellow students, or, in the end, the university. Academic and social inclusion should be viewed as intertwined aspects of what being a student means for all students, not only those who are deaf or disabled. Without institutions accepting responsibility for promoting this notion of inclusion, there is little to be hoped for from the efforts of the individual lecturer, however competent some of them might be. It is further relevant to emphasise that this study also suggests that lecturers who maintain an open and inquisitive attitude and interact with students in order to discuss their needs and preferences can compensate for their lack of specific knowledge and skills with this attitude. If universities demand inclusive practices, this might not mean that their lecturers must acquire new formal, specialised skills. Instead, focusing on general aspects of what successful collective, inclusive practises entail involves principles of interaction between lecturers and students and high teaching standards, perhaps to a larger extent than specialised expertise.

Having highlighted these implications for policies and practice in Norway and other higher education contexts, we also want to point out some further implications for research. As a qualitative study, the possibility of making general claims about the state of Norwegian universities when it comes to inclusion is limited. Nevertheless, tapping into students' own experiences in a qualitative manner has highlighted important aspects of inclusion. In particular, the manner in which our informants struggle for recognition as equal peers, and the way they reject the

notions of deaf students as a special needs education category, tell us much about the likely unintended yet profoundly felt effects of an education system labelling some students as different. An obvious challenge for research in this area is to be sensitive to the ethical aspect of education and take this into consideration when approaching different notions of inclusion.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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